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May 3, 1985

Harold E. Varmus, M.D.  
American Cancer Society  
Professor of Molecular Virology  
University of California, San Francisco  
School of Medicine  
Department of Microbiology and Immunology  
San Francisco, CA 94143

Dear Harold:

In response to your request to me to assist in the naming of the HTLV/LAV/ARD, I do have some thoughts. First of all, the early workers who coined the first three names clearly couldn't have in mind all the present day knowledge of the virus. I would think future workers would like to have brought such thinking into the name applied to the agent. For example, if it doesn't have a human but rather a primate source, would we call it H?

Advances in the last year suggest that it clearly should be called something like the "AIDS virus" given its increasingly clear causal role. On the other hand, since the AIDS syndrome is so lethal and there seems to be a significant carrier state, perhaps another name associated with lymphocytes or immunosuppression is appropriate as the infection is usually associated with immunosuppression. Should it be called the Immunosuppression virus or retrovirus?

I am not so presumptuous as to think I could quickly come up with the best name, but I know that the people who work in the field should have that mandate and not be under historical restraints, based on their prior work. The name should be based on what the thinking of future workers would be. This extraordinarily interesting virus has been clearly discovered in several different labs. I know that your international committee on virus nomenclature will do the right thing. I am glad the issue will be given thought by both involved and uninvolved individuals.

Best regards.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'T. Merigan', written over a horizontal line.

Thomas C. Merigan, M.D.

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